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Submitted by

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## The Nature Background of American Fiction.

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## The Nature Background of American Fiction.

Instead of seeing the sunset, most of us walk along the hard-paved, hard-walled streets, and look at the cobblestones. We forget that Nature, like all things of deep and abiding importance, holds herself aloof. "Seek and ye shall find"--but ye must seek. "Knock, and it shall be opened unto you"--but you must knock.

We cannot imagine life without Nature because we are inextricably bound up with her. Our food, clothing, shelter, and beauty of life all depend on her. We appreciate Nature as we appreciate our parents and God--all things that are ours or part of us, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, and without which life would be abnormal. Still we forget Nature because she is the background and the foundation. She is present, and we subconsciously take that fact for granted; but to be known she must be sought for and learned of. But since we are weary and worried, we look at the cobblestones forgetting where we might find rest.

Just as Nature is then an essential part of us, and also the accepted and normal background of our living, so she is of our literature. All great writers have understood this to some extent, but in direct proportion to their greatness they have made Nature the pervading spirit of the background. This, then, is the purpose of our study; to discover how important, extensive, and effective is the Nature background, especially, in American fiction.

American letters have had a normal growth, and the development in the handling of Nature is interestingly typical. In the early



days, the first impression that America ever produced on an English settler was recorded by Governor Bradford in his straight-forward Puritan style: "For summer being done, all things stand upon them with a weatherbeaten face; and the whole countrie, full of woods and thickets, represented a wild and savage view". In those days Nature was not a background. She was an inescapable, threatening foreground.

But the coming of men means the pushing aside of Nature. Men mean cut trees and drained swamps and cleared thickets. Men mean buildings and streets and mowed grass. Nature then becomes a background. This is one reason why the pioneer literature is valuable. It was written when Nature was yet in the foreground. Nature was so intimately concerned with every experience, that nothing so connected with men as literature must be, could be written without emphasizing her role. From that day to this Nature has become more and more of a background; but the old colonial writers blazed the way for her influence, and Nature has been felt in all our literature since.

One of the earliest interpretations of Nature in America is to be found in Bradford's "History of Plimouth Plantation": "And for ye season, it was winter, and they that know of ye winters of ye countrie know them to be sharp and violent and subject to cruell and fierce storms. Besides, what could they see but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men. Neather could they goe up to ye top of Pisgah, as it were, to view from this wilderness a more goodly countrie to feed their hopes; for which way soever they turned their eyes (save upward to ye heavens) they could find little solace or content in respecte of any outward objects."



A human bit, is it not? Do we not re-feel the bite of the winter winds, the terrible loneliness of being face to face with a pitiless, powerful Nature? Have we never felt the oppression of the hills and longed for a Pisgah wherefrom to view the good things of Nature in security? In so far as Bradford has made us see this weather-beaten land as he saw it, and feel its cruelty with him, he has surely created a paragraph of literary value.

Further than having qualities of literature, these lines of Bradford are representative of certain general characteristics in nature handling at that time--the period from 1607 up to 1700. Nature is yet observed, not investigated. As yet, she is too omnipresent to escape observation and too unattractive to win research. Descriptions are therefore superficial, giving the evident and inescapable facts rather than the details. Their aim is neither the re-created spirit desired in literature, nor scientific detailed accuracy, but simply a true relation of what they saw, told for the benefit of interested friends at home in England. If occasionally we find a chance page or line which has enough of beauty of form and humanness of touch to be called literature, it is a happy accident. Nature was feared, fought, and destroyed with unremitting toil. Nature's cruelties were so abundant as to make her gifts unnoticed or, more often, ascribed to another Source. Had we of 1918 been forced to win our bread, our homes, and our clothing from an untamed Nature with no tools but our hands; had all the work of a spring and summer, then, been suddenly beaten down by a storm, or shrivelled by an early frost, we, too, might not have been lovers of the wind and the forest.



Because the people in England were anxious to know about the new world and because the settlers had no time for scientific research, there<sup>was</sup> a natural tendency to "brighten up the dull old bits of fact." Men like Bradford were as true and just in their reports as they were in their dealings with men. They were the leaders, and they expressed the real heart of the people.

These others who wrote, yielded to the impulse to tell a good story, and watch their readers enjoy a few additional surprises. Captain John Smith and John Josselyn were among them. They delighted in seeing unusual and unbelievable things. Occasionally, then we find grave announcements like the following in their yellow old pages: "The troculus, a small bird, black and white, which breeds in nests like a Swallow's Nest, commonly has four or five young ones; and when they go away, they never fail to throw down (the chimney) one of the young birds into the room by way of gratitude."

This returning to our nation's literary childhood gives us an idea of certain of its qualities. The descriptions were general impressions, neither artistic nor scientific. The attitude toward Nature was one of fear and awe. She was always to be fought and conquered.

By the early part of the eighteenth century, settlers were more numerous. Nature was greatly subdued, and much less feared. Men lived in cities and villages and on farms that their fathers had cleared before them. The great silent endless woods, and the creeping, treacherous life within them, were pushed out of the door-yard farther toward the horizon. For the first time, Nature was seen in her whole-



ness. Whenever Nature can be seen, or even imagined, in her unity, she becomes alluring and beautiful. Men long to know the details after they have had the prospect. It was natural, then, that Nature's greater recession into the background meant an immediate growth of leisure for, and interest in, appreciation and investigation. This development is shown first in the writings of that charming Virginia cavalier, William Byrd. His "History of the Dividing Line" marks the beginning of a new spirit toward Nature. He is accurate to the detail, yet never loses sight of the great unity. He is interesting because he goes further than the mere relation of fact, and touches the emotions continually; here a bit of humor, there the thrill of adventure, always a keen sensory appeal.

His close observation of detail may be illustrated by this description of the pines in North Carolina; "The Pines in this part of the country are of a different Species from those that grow in Virginia; their bearded leaves are much longer and their Cones much larger. Each Cell contains a Seed of the size and figure of a black ey'd Pea. The smallest of these Pines are full of Cones, which are 8 or 9 inches long, and each affords commonly 60 or 70 seeds".

A history containing only a list of such accurate details would be but tiresomely readable. However, we find frequently a touch like this; "This (the venison) we consigned to the Wolves, which in return serenaded us great part of the Night. They are very clamorous in their Banquets, which we know is the way some other Brutes have of expressing their thanks to Providence."

A later writer brings us a new interpretation of Nature. He



sees the idyllic, the peaceful, the kindly, rather than the thrilling and adventurous. This is Hector St. John Creve-coeur, another poet-naturalist of early days. He finds in Nature the reflection of what is good in Man, and in Man the reflection of Nature. He is a scientist, but in his attention to detail, he never forgets the greater meaning or the personal significance. He writes with perfect accuracy and a sincere delight. Inspired with the same emotion of the later poet who wrote,

"Break, break, break,

On they cold gray stones, oh sea,

And I would that my tongue could utter

The thoughts that arise in me,"

Creve-coeur says, less perfectly, but with a like spirit:

"My ears were stunned with the roar of its waves rolling one over the other, as if impelled by a superior force to overwhelm the spot on which I stood. My nostrils involuntarily inhaled the saline vapors which arose from the foaming billows or from the weeds scattered on the shores. My mind suggested a thousand vague reflections but now half-forgot and all indistinct. And who can behold so singular an element which by its impetuosity seems to be the destroyer of this poor planet, yet at particular times accumulates the scattered fragments and produces islands and continents fit for men to dwell on! "

When men come to see into the heart of Nature thus accurately and understandingly, literature must soon be brought forth. What we



find in embryo in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in a Byrd and Creve-coeur is born later into a Cooper, a Bryant, and on to Emerson, Thoreau, and Burroughs. For literature, like a child, develops, is born, and grows to the stature of manhood. Our American literature is growing. It is young now and daring. Some are not sure that it is literature yet, but when we look into the normality of its making, the steadiness of its progress, we become prophetic with the fore-knowledge of faith.

In this development, how has Nature taken her place? From fear of her as an enemy, men achieved by conquest means of using the enemy. From the utilitarian came accuracy of observation. Out of accuracy grew science and literature.

In the early days American nature was so unfamiliar as to need description. Self-evident facts were described minutely, and compared with English scenery. Naturalists like Creve-coeur were poets in spirit. Explorers like Byrd were naturalists at heart. Unfortunately, however, we cannot say that the poets were often naturalists. Nature was not considered "good literary stuff" in those days, especially American nature. When one assayed to write, he wrote a "Prince of Parthia", "Day of Doom", or a "Columbiad". Nature was only beginning to find her place in writing. The increasing number of naturalists gave evidence that the start was made, but it was a long time before a "Forest Hymn" could be written.

In these days, only the naturalists wrote about Nature, and, incidentally, quite from the purpose, attained some bits of literature.



They made Nature the purpose and the foreground. If Nature was touched by the pen at all, she was the centre of attention. The value of background and the psychology of suggestion were not recognized until Cooper and Irving.

Later, in the struggle and hope of the Revolution a new nation and a new literature were born. With the strong consciousness of ownership that freedom prompted, came a keener sensitiveness to the quality of this unique and unbounded land. "Thy rocks and rills, they woods and templed hills, of thee we sing." There was pride in this country that belonged to them--pride in its fruitfulness, its unlimited possibilities, and its mysterious, alluring beauty. At the same time, there were men of letters who dreamed of making America rank high by means of her literary offerings. The pride and the dream had been growing for years. Now, at last, they came together in one man, Charles Brockden Brown, the first novelist in America. To be sure, his is not a name that will live for any other than a historical interest. But for his own day, he achieved his end. His wild and grotesque tales were read eagerly at home and in England. He was welcomed as a great writer, and he developed with a free and unguided hand the nature material that made his setting. American nature, he interpreted after his own heart. The forests were bleak and eerie, but they were still, indisputably, American forests. Strange voices came sounding ominously from the depths of gashed cliffs--American rocks with ragged fir-trees hanging over the edge. He used the background that he knew, and pictured it so vividly and impressively that the descriptions are still compellingly interesting. However, his plot and characters were not so accurately taken



from the life; and instead of making both grow out of the nature background in spirit and circumstance as they do in all living, he made the fatal mistake of reversing the order. He imagined, or rather fancied, a strange set of characters in various strange situations, and then added the nature background, not as an essential part of it all, but a means to enhance the particular atmosphere and tone that he especially desired. Nature was used as an ornament, not an inherent necessity.

Charles Brockden Brown was a pioneer, but not a great writer, The line of great writers began soon after him, though, with the work of Irving and Cooper. With them, plot and character are bound up naturally and inextricably with the setting. Rip Van Winkle goes to the mountains, because he finds in them much that is like himself-- trees mossy and cool and unpruned, leaf-damp paths that lead to deep, alluring shades; and all that is free, untended and wild. Dame Van Winkle belongs in the town with the gossip and cares of the street and store. And through the whole story the clear mountain sunshine warms Irving's kindly humor as it warms the hills and valleys of his Hudson river home.

However, the story-teller Cooper is one of the few American masters. Irving is picturesque, appealing, and contagiously cheerful, but not rugged or strong. Cooper, on the other hand, gives to his novels the strength that human nature admires above all else. In Cooper the plot, the characters, and the background are balanced and harmonized. There is romance and realism just as in normal life. The treatment is straightforward, sincere, and vigorous. It is hard to separate one part from another, but the nature background is noteworthy. He holds

It is a very old and well-known fact that the  
people of the world have been suffering from  
the effects of the war for many years. The  
war has caused a great deal of suffering and  
death, and it has also caused a great deal of  
poverty and distress. The people of the world  
are now suffering from the effects of the war  
in many different ways. They are suffering from  
the loss of their homes and their property, and  
they are suffering from the loss of their  
livelihood. They are suffering from the loss of  
their loved ones, and they are suffering from  
the loss of their freedom. They are suffering  
from the loss of their dignity, and they are  
suffering from the loss of their hope. They are  
suffering from the loss of their faith, and they  
are suffering from the loss of their love. They  
are suffering from the loss of their life, and  
they are suffering from the loss of their soul.

The war has also caused a great deal of  
poverty and distress. The people of the world  
are now suffering from the effects of the war  
in many different ways. They are suffering from  
the loss of their homes and their property, and  
they are suffering from the loss of their  
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us breathless with the daring of Hawkeye and Chingachgook, but never is the silent, mysterious endlessness of the forest for a moment forgotten. His best stories take place in the unbroken woods of New York along Otsego Lake and in the Lake George region. The trees may now have been cut, and sun-burned little villages taken their place, but Cooper's trees and caves and waterfalls are immortal. We can still read "The Deerslayer"; hear the rush of the waters, the stir of the wind in the uncounted trees, and feel as he felt, the "breathing stillness of the woods". Cooper has succeeded above any other American writer in making the forest live. It is not a painted woodland scene, where a play might be staged, but it is active. The leaves rustle against each other, the squirrels chatter, there is the crackling of the low bushes when the deer tears through with his antlers, the pine needles and leaves are fragrant and fresh. There is always sound or movement. Besides this use of accurate details, he creates an impression that is in harmony with the spirit of the story. When Hawkeye is protecting Cora and her sister from the Indians in the cave, there is a sense of foreboding in the slow dripping of the water from the rocks. Just as we naturally notice the details that accord or contrast with our mood, so Cooper chooses that which expresses the keynote of his situation. After him, we find many who accomplish some part of what he did, but none who approach him in all. It is only in recent years that anyone of his literary calibre has appeared. His realm is the central west, and Hamlin Garland's "Son of the Middle Border" is coming to rank with the "Last of the Mohicans", and others of our best American fiction.



It is a long step in time from Cooper to Garland, and many come in between. Hawthorne and Poe are among America's few greatest artists, but their handling of Nature was not original or unusually strong. Neither of them knew Nature, so they could not use picturesque details. They did not love it so they could not interpret its real spirit. Both used it impressionistically. Details were seldom given, and mood-born pictures were suggested rather than described. The lonely, treeless plot where the woman of the scarlet letter lived is a dim picture suggested once and never changing throughout the story, as Nature herself changes in reality. Poe describes his nature background in detail, but it is wild, strange, and alluringly horrible. The dank tarn of the house of Usher is something so loathsome, and deep with unseen crawling things that it is unforgettable. But it is not Nature that is pictured any more than Poe's characters are real people. It is an impression so vivid and strikingly terrible that it clings in one's memory with fascinating horror. Hawthorne was unsurpassed as a symbolic revealer of spiritual meanings, but his characters are no more fleshly warm than his setting is vivid. Poe was great as no other writer has been, as an impressionist. He was a romancer, depicting life not as it is normally, but as it appears to be in rare intervals of terror and loneliness. For that reason, Poe appeals only occasionally, when we are in a mood to escape from normality to horror for horror's sake. As romancers, Hawthorne and Poe made nature as they made their characters and plot,--what they wanted them to be for some purpose or effect. Neither is typically American; neither could have placed his story in England or elsewhere as easily as in America.



So far the nation and its literature have been forming. The old idea that Nature is to be feared and hated has long worn away. The later conception that she is only for man's use is still strong, but Cooper's interpretation of the spirit of the woods shows that a deeper appreciation is developing. In letters, America has attained a measure of self-confidence. She has found in herself literary resources peculiar and distinctive--a natural environment that cannot be duplicated in kind or variety, and the new type of life and character that arise from it.

Nature has been given her rightful place in our fiction. Her spirit has been interpreted accurately and effectively by Cooper, our first great storyteller. The characters and plot grow out of, and belong to, their natural surroundings. There is a tendency to locate a story in a definite section of the country--in central New York by Cooper, the Hudson river valley by Irving and southern New England by Charles Brockden Brown. These then are the contributions made in the treatment of nature by American story-writers.

The corner-stone was laid by Cooper for the building of a genuinely great American literature. It remained for the expanding nation to produce new writers who would follow his plan, but add to and develop it.

It happened then that the nation did expand and produce, in a phenomenal and unprecedented way. For the first hundred years, America had stayed at home in New England, the South, and the Middle states. But the lure of the unknown was a magnet to the hardy, adventurous sons of pilgrim and cavalier fathers. They longed to go beyond the mountains, to see the forests and streams on the other



side, to discover the Indian fastnesses; and they dreamed of a greater America.

So they went--Boone, Sevier, Robertson, Lewis and Clark--blazing paths through the unknown forest and waste, killing and making their food and clothing from the life of the wild, fighting the wary and trecherous red-men who menaced every step of the way. It was a perilous, unequal warfare that these explorers waged, but the price was even then not too great. After the period of exploration and conquest, the conquerors came home for their families, who went out with them to build shack-homes in the wilderness. Separated absolutely from luxuries, conveniences, or help, they built their stockades for defence and began over again the old story of settlement. Once more the forests were feared, as the sea is still feared and hated by the fishermen's wives. But as the Indians gradually yielded and vanished, as farms produced abundant grain, the fear diminished and they looked to a further conquering and using of the immense resources at their doors.

The story of transformation has been most vividly recorded, not by a novelist, but by a historian, Theodore Roosevelt, in his "Winning of the West", which will live for its accuracy as well as for its added quality of vitality and human appeal. Like Cooper, Roosevelt's forest is animate with sound and movement. The turbid swirling Ohio sweeps on with slow powerful strength. There is the deep under-current of utter loneliness and separation from all human-kind. The reader knows for a time Boone or Robertson or Sevier, fighting and struggling with them, feeling the brush of the branches and the spongy leaf-sodded path, watching and constantly dreading that the Indian death-yell will break the hushed stillness. This period of western



expansion lacks literary expression just as all periods like it do. The people are too busy fighting and building, or planting and harvesting, to read or write. Their evening recreation is gathering about the fireside, talking of their crops and their families, or singing the rollicking old pioneer song;

"Cheer up, brothers, as we go  
O'er the mountains, westward ho,  
Where herds of deer and buffalo  
Furnish the fare.  
Then o'er the hills in legions, boys,  
Fair freedom's star  
Points to the sunset regions, boys,  
Ha-ha, ha-ha!"

The literature of this day was left to be written by the grandchildren, and few of them can interpret what they have never seen. In fiction, it has been tried, but never successfully accomplished.

Nature was thus changed by the incoming of explorers and settlers. Forests were cleared away, sections and squares plotted out, and cities and farms came to take the place of the limitless wilderness. The people and their lives were also changed by the moulding power of their natural surroundings. It is a striking fact that environment actually influences man's physical form. It has even been shown that the heads of babies born in America of foreign parents will differ in shape from the heads of their older brothers and sis-



ters born in Europe. In the same way, the settlers became a new people, as the new west became a new nation. They were no longer New Englanders, or Southerners, but partook of the Nature of their surroundings.

While the West enacted the great drama of expansion, the home states were refining and growing into a productive maturity. There was more leisure here than in the fields and forests of the West, more colleges and universities, and more interest in the things of the spirit. It was natural then that New England, with Boston for its literary center, took the lead in the literary movement which was soon to spread over the whole new country.

After Cooper and Irving, there developed the idea, first among essayists like Emerson and Thoreau, and finally among story-tellers, that the best source of literary subject-matter was at home--along one's own river-bank and forest glade, and as close as one's own hedge and apple-tree. Irving was the first to create "local color"--the making of the setting stand out as distinctive and locally characteristic. It was a long time before he had many followers. The period of poets and essayists occupied the next fifty years. Nature was interpreted as a revelation of God - as Bryant said in his "Forest Hymn":

"But thou art here, thou fill'st

The solitude. Thou art in the soft winds

That run along the summit of these trees

In music; thou art in the cooler breath

That from the inmost darkness of the place

Comes, scarcely felt; the barky trunks, the ground,



The fresh moist ground, are all instinct with thee."

Thoreau found in Nature the glory of the primitive; Emerson the "garment of the Invisible Spirit". These men, along with other thinkers of their time, were interested in Nature from a religious and philosophic as well as aesthetic point of view. Nature was foreground material for them. They have interpreted her spirit so spontaneously and so humanly that even those who know Nature and the Infinite least are stirred by this revelation.

Since 1870 the interest in fiction has again revived. Much of it is imitative, sensational, and cheap, even when it is otherwise wholesome. Most of it is a discouraging prospect, but is so weak as to be fortunately forgettable. However, there are occasional discoveries that are nearly as good as all the rest is bad. The most striking tendency is the location of the story in a definite locality, and making the characters and plot grow naturally out of it.

In New England, which is geographically the place to begin, in a review of sectional literature, some of the best of the late fiction has been written. The nature background has been emphasized not unduly but normally. Irving's contribution of "local color" has been seized upon, and the treatment, in many cases, improved. As the Catskill Mountains had been given to all who read, so it remained for someone to give New England - her rocks and pine forests, stony hills and steep slopes, the clear clean streams that wind between the hills to the ocean, the "pointed firs" and the shifting sand dunes, the rocky cliffs and sleepy tide-washed beaches. For New England is distinctive, It is a stern and yet kindly country - like its people.



The hills are rock-ribbed and untillable, but the streams in the valleys are swift and powerful, with strength for tasks beyond men's muscles. Because the hills cannot be farmed, they are left to Nature. The result is unending forests, with the needles of pine and fir making the ground a soft spongy carpet to the feet. Great rounded rocks overgrown with moss and dripping with cool damp dew rest silently on as they did when the Indians crept over these same forest paths to spy upon our fathers. In the spring, trailing arbutus hides its sweet-smelling blossoms under the snow-dampened leaves and in the rock crevices. Tiny red checker-berries shine from under their moist green leaves, before the snow has melted from the shaded side of the rocks and trees. Soggy wet leaf-mold that sinks deep into the soft earth blazes the way often to a hidden spring of clear earth-chilled water. Then there are cleared meadows where hay and corn struggle for growth against the rocks that hold and crowd them. But they are picturesque meadows with overgrown stone fences and morning glories and daisies scattered where the grain should be. In the end, the up-country streams go through towns and factories, finally pouring in yellow turbid tumult through rocky gateways to the sea. Here the great rocks, gaunt and bare, act as an invincible fortress for the land against the age-old onslaught of the waves. Piled high by some immense force in a geologic age gone by they still stand firm and unyielding, strong for us and generations to come. These are the coasts in the north country. In the south below Boston and down on Cape Cod, there is a new world. There the beaches stretch out lazily in the sun,



and the jolly little crabs race back and forth for unaccountable crab-like purposes. The sand which has been made by the ocean from great invincible rocks on some rugged coast is stored here for safe keeping. On Cape Cod, huge shifting sand dunes with dry tenacious shrubbery - bleached and parched of all color - are a bit of the Sahara repeated in rugged rock-bound New England.

The people again are like their country. Stern and uncompromising is the true New Englander, but tender and kindly in the hidden places. Along the northern coast, the seamen are rough and uncouth - fighting the waves with the unhoping, silent persistence of fate. But in the South, where the sand dunes shift, there is another sort of seaman - rugged and hardy to be sure - but a little more tender and human. He sells his dory when his pile is made, and goes home. Then he and his old friends sit on the sands, or lounge on the grocery store counters smoking and re-telling old yarns with a quaint and altogether irresistible sense of humor.

This then is the life and nature background that looks for interpretation by its writers. Too many have caricatured New England in an attempt, not to picture her, but to create best sellers. The result is that New England is frequently imagined as a land of dried-up villages where shrill-voiced old maids make life miserable for abnormally vindictive little boys. But there are a few who have the real spirit of New England - who have discovered the romance and realism of its people, and have pictured the romance and realism of its sunny farms and fog-drenched harbors. There are many writers of the coast, because there they find a fit background for dramatic



situations. Wilbur Daniel Steele has made us see the lonely, dismal marshes and swamps where nothing is heard but the sliding of occasional water-snakes between the reeds and rushes. The cry of gulls, and the sweep of their wings as they scud over the black still waters make an eerie background for his stories with their strange and haunting analysis of the black, still places in the human heart. The characters and events are born of their mysterious setting, but what they are and what they do sinks out of memory. The limitless marsh with the still dark sea beyond, the screaming gulls, the wind-swept reeds, and the lonely, oppressive darkness remain vivid and distinct, haunting those of us who have never known the secrets of the swamp at night.

Still another writer gives us the spirit of the coast. His field is among the rocky Maine harbors and islands, where Nature is overwhelming in her irresistible power and cold, repressed beauty, where the people are silent and hard, with all the human weakness hidden within. It takes an artist to re-create in words a Nature and a people like these. One man, not a writer by profession, has succeeded in telling his story simply and faithfully. It is a true story and he writes it with understanding sympathy. It is ex-President Eliot's story of a milkman's conflict with Nature to save a baby. The milkman is the hero, and Nature in the foreground, as she often is in lives of these coastmen, is the offensive force. There is the taste of the salt sea spray, the dizzy descent from the crest to the trough of a deluging wave, the shudder of the dory when the next wave strikes



and lifts it high. A human soul is nothing in this raging tumult of wind and water; and the reader feels with Eliot's milkman all the stupendous power of Nature in tumult.

Back from the coast, New England is different; but still distinctively characteristic. Here the dramatic situations take place in human hearts rather than on the high seas. There have been many voices for these rural people, and the world knows their hills and forests through many writers; Mary Wilkins Freeman, Sarah Orne Jewett and Margaret Deland among the best. Mrs. Freeman gives us the prosy, gossippy village, picturing the hard and querulous New England farmer, as Hamlin Garland pictures the middle westerner, without gloss or more romance than is true. The farms are small and rocky, full of dry hills and swampy valleys. The soil is light, and rough with stones. The south side of the hill may produce well, but there is always a north side where the sun strikes too seldom. It is the north side that Mrs. Freeman would have us appreciate, and it is the north side of these stern, repressed people that she understands with the sympathy of one who springs from their stock. She shows the barn-yard and the ditch and the kitchen, and less often the parlor or the Sunday School picnic. Her nature background is usually given for relief or contrast. Occasionally, we find a swift picture of the far away hills, the wind-swept sky, and the rare distances. Her background is one "renovated" by Man, and it is consequently un-beautiful and cramped as is the repressed and unnatural side of their



lives. When men begin to destroy Nature, they destroy the love of it from their own lives, and the poetry of life is gone. It is so with many farmers, who of all people have a God-given chance to know the secrets of the woods and the fields and their creatures. Mrs. Freeman shows the lack and the tragedy in her unadorned, New England style.

With something more of tenderness and kindly understanding, Sarah Orne Jewett takes away the covering of hardness. Far from being sentimental, she yet makes her readers feel deeply what she expresses with quiet but intense restraint. Her treatment of nature is of its wholes. She gives a picture of the pointed firs, but not of the brown needles underneath, or the rough, ragged bark within. Hers is the picture of black, straight trees silhouetted against the sky and singing softly of night and woodland mysteries. Nature under her pen becomes kindly and gentle like her characters. Her treatment is brief and almost casual, but always effective. The centre of attention is always the main character; for instance, the Queen's twin. The reader must never forget her, during even a glance at the sunset or the meadows. The hills are described in a few forceful, impressionistic sentences, for the purpose of making clear and emphatic the bleak solitude of the little woman's home. Later the extent of her pride and happiness in her relation to the Queen is shown by the fact that she is never lonely in spite of her lonely surroundings. This illustration is typical of Sarah Orne Jewett's use and treatment of nature as a background. In a sense, she is comparable to Hawthorne, but she makes her background genuinely real and earthy. They both paint it in a few words and im-



pressionistically, but his is often strange and unfamiliar.

Another of the leading New England fiction writers is Margaret Deland. Here again we find much the same handling of nature - strict holding to the background and use only to explain and make clearer the action of the characters. Neither Miss Jewett nor Miss Deland ever allow nature to become an active part in the story, thus affecting the plot, as Eliot uses the storm in "John Gilly": Only as nature is a part of the characters, influencing their actions as environment naturally does, is it emphasized in their stories. In reading we are no more conscious of the road-sides and hedges, the forest and waste, than we are of the nature life about us every day. This method of handling contrasts strongly with the method of Irving and Cooper, who gave whole paragraphs and pages to long descriptions that the average reader skips entirely. The method of Margaret Deland and Sarah Orne Jewett is the modern way. It suggests in the background only what the average person would be vaguely conscious of, and presents it in such a way that the reader is scarcely conscious that he is reading description. The method has its advantages, but whether it is the best and final way we are inclined to doubt.

New England is the section much-written, and is therefore hard to leave. But these few are the leaders who have given us the chief phases of her life and the various languages of her unique nature. The next section which has found great expression in American lit-



erature is the South.

The mountains are one background; the broad plantations another; and the bayous and marshes of the Gulf region a third. Here again the inseparable oneness of character and nature background is made strikingly manifest. A Creole could never come from the mountains, nor a mountaineer from New Orleans or Saint Medard. Uncle Remus would be unthinkable in any other place in the world than Marse William's sunny backyard. It is then impossible to separate plot action from character, or character from setting which is the foundation of all these.

The interpreter of mountain life is "Charles Egbert Craddock" or Mary Murfree. Her art is restrained and at times almost cold. Most writers of mountain life seem tempted to become either sentimentally romantic or brutally realistic. Miss Murfree is a realist but she has a true enough insight to see beneath the brutal surface into the greater reality which is near romance. Her characters are inherently like their own wild, rough mountain home. There is a sense of utter isolation and oppressive mystery that makes sunshine and meadows and furnished homes seem strangely of another world. The people are isolated and unfamiliar too - ragged and roughly unkempt, cruel and hard, but hospitable and proud with a natural, elemental dignity. This is Mary Murfree's picture of the mountain hero. But her contribution is not a great character or a great plot. She has given us no deeper, keener understanding of the human heart, as did



Sarah Orne Jewett and Margaret Deland. What Mary Murfree did was to incarnate the Tennessee mountains into something more than a picture, for hers has color, sound, movement, and forest fragrance. There is the steep ravine and rushing water, the motions of branches and birds and creeping things, the pungent odor of pine and cedar.

The South means to most of us the southern plantation with its great luxurious mansion in the foreground, and the little negro shanties beyond. The former with its charm and beauty, romance and tragedy; has been told best by Thomas Nelson Page; the latter in its carefree joys and rollicking happiness by Joel Chandler Harris, creator of Uncle Remus and the immortal Tar Baby.

Page creates an atmosphere of tender, half-sad reminiscence. We look from the days after the war with their decay and tragedy back to the "good old days" when the great house was lighted and merry, when the negro shanties were full, the pickaninnies plentiful and happy, when there was life and pleasure and love on the broad plantations. Page's nature background is in harmony with this atmosphere. He shows the "wild waste of sassafras" where the fields had once been, the "once-splendid mansions now fast falling to decay set back far from the road in proud seclusion, among groves of oak and hickory, now scarlet and gold with the early frost". It is occasional nature touches like these - accurate, artistically chosen, and impressionistic - that typify Page's treatment. He describes wholes, and brings in his descriptions incidentally. He devotes a few paragraphs to pure setting, and when he does this, we see a picture that we do not easily forget. The songs of meadowlarks,



the hum of bees, the weed-swamped but fragrant fields, the still, deserted houses surrounded by untrimmed trees - all that is characteristic of the war-worn South is as if we had known it in fact.

Joel Chandler Harris' purpose is primarily to show the sunny side of negro life, the joy of mere living in southern warmth and delicious idleness. He gives us the true humor of Uncle Remus and of the thousands like him - the humor that stirs our kindlier sympathies and refreshes us with a happy, sane philosophy. The nature background is the plantation backyard where Uncle Remus sits on a bench and tells stories, the brushwood and canebrake where Br'er Rabbit dwells in dignified but interrupted peace. It is a setting that leaves a long impression of early spring mornings, when there is the odor of thawing earth and green sprouting things, with over all the warm sun and in all the love of living and growing.

In some ways the life of the Creoles in New Orleans and along the bayous of the lower Mississippi is similar to the mountain and the negro side of the plantation life. The hidden poetic nature of the mountaineer and his aversion to work or progress is like the Creole and the negro. But otherwise the contrast is as great as the mountains and the cotton-fields are from the marshes and the river-bends. The Far South is like another country - a luxuriant, tropical land of sensuous warmth and alluring romantic beauty. The stiff palmettos and graceful magnolias are perfect to the point of seeming artificiality. Even in her abandon, Nature seems to us of the North to be man-made. In the forests, the great trees massive and gnarled, are made weird and uncanny by shadowy hangings of clinging, matted southern moss. It is quiet in the southern forest. There are



fewer singing birds, and no brooks that carol their way over mossy rocks and clean stones. The streams are slow and sluggish, stagnant and hidden in the mysteries of under-brush and lilies, - "the region where reigns perpetual summer,

"Where through the Golden Coast, and groves of orange and citron, Sweeps with majestic curve and river away to the eastward, Over their heads the towering and tenebrous boughs of the cypress Met in a dusky arch, and trailing mosses in mid-air Waved like banners that hang on the walls of ancient cathedrals." This then is the realm of George Cable, who has given us unforgettably the romantic charm that surrounds and protects even the tragedies of the Creoles. He describes the life and nature background of the South as it is in reality, but he envelops it all as the Creole himself does, in a mystic, tender haze of romance. They are a passionate, emotionally luxurious people - part of the tropical warmth and sunshine, in spirit as they are in flesh. George Cable is more than a landscape painter. In fact he is more like the writer of New England in his ability to suggest a nature atmosphere rather than give a picture. We do not see any more of the palmettos and magnolias than is necessary to the story development, but we know that it is tropical and luxuriant. These modern writers, who create a background by a few impressionistic words, are depending on some previous knowledge on the part of their readers. If we had never travelled in the South, never heard or read accurate, detailed descriptions of its scenery, George Cable's background would be



vague. However, most of us do have a picture of the South that we have acquired in some way, and Cable's impressionism is so artistic that it serves to recall vividly all that we have ever known or imagined. Taking for granted that we know his South, he does not disdain to give Nature an active place in his stories; as, for instance "Belles Demoiselles, the realm of maiden beauty, the home of merriment, the house of dancing, all in the tremor and glow of pleasure suddenly sunk, with one short, wild wail of terror -- sunk, sunk, down; down, down, into the merciless, unfathomable flood of the Mississippi". His descriptions are full of action, as in the following: "Great circles of muddy surface would boil up from hundreds of feet below, and gloss over, and seem to float away - sink, come back again under water, and with only a soft hiss surge up again, and again drift off, and vanish".

From the sunny, romance-loving South we come again to the cooler, more bracing North. The Middle States east of the Mississippi have missed being interpreted in literature. For some reason a dash of romance has seldom sweetened the prose of Michigan, Illinois, and Ohio life. The potential writers here never wrote, because they were required to farm and do chores and make money. Indiana, however, is typical of all this section; and Indiana has produced at least one fiction-writer of some value, and one of exceeding popularity, if not of lasting greatness. In the early days, Edward Eggleston made immortal the pioneer life with its hardships and far-between joys, in "The Hoosier Schoolboy", "The Circuit Rider", and "The



Hoosier Schoolmaster". Booth Tarkington, a more ephemeral novelist, is giving us now the humor and comedy of the present day in the small-town life of the middle west. The "man from home" of Kokomo County, and William who was seventeen, are his typical characters - self-made men without culture or education but with plenty of the American idealized virtues of honesty and shrewdness and kindliness; self-conscious boys who are a puzzle to psychologists with their timidity and audacity and endless other paradoxes.

Edward Eggleston is a writer of an earlier day, and he has the characteristics of his time. "Local color" and the impressionistic aim are foreign terms to him. Like Cooper, he describes in long paragraphs, telling exactly what he sees. When the circuit-rider is going from one camp meeting to another, Eggleston keeps the point of view clear by constantly describing the ever-changing landscape. The style seems old-fashioned to us now and somewhat studied, but there is a good story here, with worth while human people to know, and a wilderness background that makes the joy and love and struggle of these days all that is fine and heroic. The bitter cold makes our fingers numb with those of the women who take hold of the frosty pump. The cutting winds of a winter morning, when there are cows to milk and horses to feed, chill the reader as if those chores were actually for him to do. The clearing where the log cabin stands, the forest all-encircling, with its immense mystery and danger, the calls of woods creatures and the murmur of waters, with



the clear clean smell of pine, and leaves, and cold damp earth - all this outside the cabin; and inside, the crackling flames in the fireplace, the glow on the white walls, and the contagious cheerfulness of work and laughter - this is the history that Eggleston keeps warm and vital.

Eggleston's novels interpret the life of the early days in true early-day style and spirit. Booth Tarkington's are as different as is the life of the pioneer from the life of the small-town citizen to-day; and just as the small town has pushed away and forgotten Nature, so has its interpreter left her out of his calculations. There remains only an impression of a few stores, a few streets, and beyond, flat fields and straight roads. In most ways Booth Tarkington is fair, at least, to the superficial and self-evident, but he is not fair to the nature background of Indiana. She has her "haunts of coot and hern", her "rocks and rills", and even a few "templed hills". But the reader who does not know Indiana would never suspect it, Tarkington sees the straight-ahead, self-evident highway - in human hearts as well as in Nature - and passes by the little hidden paths that lead to the real and elemental. His work cannot rank as literature with that of Eggleston, but it records with interest the life of a passing age.

Another state has attained especial literary expression, and that is the state of Kansas. Here is surely a land of peculiar romance. No state has quite such a history - a history of dramatic situations and passionate leaders. Its nature background is the kind to create men of stern purpose and driving emotions. The prairie rolls away



to the horizon in a great level plain, over which the wind sweeps in cold bitter blasts, and upon which the parching sun of summer beats and burns. It is a country to produce men of far vision, great plans, and the stern fibre that achieves high purpose. Many writers have been thrilled with the reserve strength of Kansas. William Allen White is one, who has contributed a book of more than passing worth in his "Certain Rich Man". It is distinctively a Kansas book in its background and characters, but is universal in its appeal to our love of clear bracing winds and the eternally right. He treats his nature background as a fundamental element in his story. He suggests much, but he also devotes much space to simple description. He does one thing that is new in his setting development. His story covers about seventy years, from the childhood of the hero to his old age. -In the beginning then it is a new country - a great stretch of open unsettled land in the throes of a life and death struggle between two types of settlers. The wholeness of view is what White aims for, and he achieves it with remarkable success. No history or other story gives one quite the sense of vast lonely struggling Kansas - with her far-reaching plains, her open sunny skies, and the quality of air that urges men to action. Then the boy grows up, and the town changes from a few shacks to a few more houses and a department store. The open places beyond are squares of wheat, separated by a checker-board system of long white roads. The grove and the mill pond are forgotten, and the boy becomes a "certain rich man". He grows old. The little town is a city with parks and pleasures. But the rich man tires of it all. He has lost his God, and he goes to the grove, which was God's first temple, and to the hills whence cometh help. It is .



the same grove and the same God that he had lost; and we come away believing with him that God and Nature are the "same yesterday, to-day, and forever".

It seems a long step from William Allen White to Samuel Clemens, but in reality they are connected in their common effort to interpret the various types of middle western life. White gave us the Kansas of history while Clemens gave the Mississippi valley. The life on the great river has been essentially different from any other in the nation, which is entirely due to the fact that the river determined every activity of the people, and in turn moulded their characters. Mark Twain seized upon the immense literary resources of Mississippi life, and re-created it for readers of nearly every civilized nation. The principal interest is as it should be - in his characters and plot, but there is added pleasure in seeing and feeling a life we ourselves have not know. For he makes us feel life with him. The strain and creak of the river boat as it wrenches itself away from the dock, the asthmatic chugging of the fat little tugs, the river smells of fish and tarpaulin and grease - this is one side of the picture. There are others - the island where Tom Sawyer goes with his band of robbers. There is the deep forest where Huck Finn hides from his father. The landscape is constantly changing, and always we are conscious of the background which is a part of Huck and Tom and which makes them immortal because they are eternally natural. Mark Twain's favorite method of describing his nature background is an actual contribution. Every writer has used it to some extent, but none more successfully than he. Instead of using too many long descriptions, or over-doing the impressionistic method, he develops the ef-



fect of the setting upon the characters - which is probably the truest way of describing any background, for the human interest is after all the main thing and only as the rest relates to it is it important.

From the Mississippi river valley to the heights of the Far West, is the next step. Most people do not realize how much their conception of the West they owe to literature. For those of us who have never seen it, there is a distinct and vivid impression of immensity and over-whelming majesty expressed in snow-tipped mountains that melt away into clouds and mist, in masses and piles of bare sunset-colored rock, and gashes in the earth that go down endlessly into a dim and unknown chasm far below. There is the mining camp with rude shacks and bare grassless ground, surrounded by the still straight mountain trees with their dark silhouetted forms a guarding sentry between the miner and all that connects him to home. It is such conceptions as these with all their atmosphere of strength and limitless power that are the gift of literature. The writer who has done the most in widening our experience to include the far mountain west of California is Bret Harte. Nature serves him as a great emotional background, strengthening the story impression and linked inseparably with it. To bring out the harmony and peace that the Luck brought to Roaring Camp, he shows the harmony and peace of Nature, who is almost given a place equal to the characters in the story.



"Howbelt, whether creeping over the pine boughs or lying lazily on his back blinking at the leaves about him, to him the birds sang, the squirrels chattered, and the flowers bloomed. Nature was his nurse and playfellow. For him she would let slip between the leaves golden shafts of sunlight that fell just within his grasp; she would send wandering breezes to visit him with the balm of bay and resinous gum; to him the tall redwoods nodded familiarly and sleepily, the bumble bees buzzed, and the rooks cawed a slumberous accompaniment".

And again he uses his nature background for contrast and for the purpose of showing the extent of the baby's influence on the brutal coarseness of the men:

"There was a rude attempt to decorate his bower with flowers and sweet-smelling shrubs, and generally someone would bring him a cluster of wild honeysuckles, azaleas or the painted blossoms of Las Mariposas. The men had suddenly awakened to the fact that there were beauty and significance in these trifles they had so long trodden carelessly beneath their feet". And again he uses it to bring out the emotional impression of utter isolation: "The camp lay in a triangular valley, between two hills and a river. The only outlet was a steep trail over the summit of a hill that faced the cabin, now illuminated by the rising moon. The suffering woman might have seen it from the rude bunk whereon she lay - seen it winding like a silver thread until it was lost in the stars above".

Later when the woman dies, he refers again to this description symbolically; "Within an hour she had climbed, as it were, that rugged road that led to the stars, and so passed out of Roaring Camp,



its sin and shame forever".

There is another West than the one that Bret Harte interprets. It is the West of arid plains and desert wastes where dry winds blow dry dust through the crackling sage brush, where prairie dogs and swift-creeping lizards are the only evidence that life still exists. There would seem to be no literary material here, but wherever human life can be found, there the great dramas are sure to be re-enacted. The Mexicans and Indians still cling to their desert border homes, and here among them Helen Hunt Jackson has located her stirring drama of the South-west. Here and in the paradise of southern California, we follow Ramona and Alessandro through dangers and despair, from her sunny pleasant home to the canons and the desert places. There is very little description, but much is suggested. We see the immense gray sides of the canon looming high above the heads of the fleeing husband and wife. We see the fine lacework of mustard flowers that make a golden snow-storm shining in the California sun. It is a few such touches that create a nature background.

Stewart Edward White is another voice of the Far West. He speaks as one having authority, because he lived the life and knew all its romance and realism. He gives us a much different impression of California than Bret Harte. His story deals with the gold rush of '49, from the point of view of four men who are dreamers and tender foets, before they have become brutalized by isolation from refinement and home life. It is nevertheless a story of stern realism - describing the wearying, discouraging search for the nuggets that were



so seldom there; the coarse humor; the wild, feverish pleasures of the bar-room; and for the background "the great peace and majesty of the California mountains that cooled their spirits". It is this sense of the abiding strength of Nature that makes his firm foundation in the struggle between men and the earth for her resources. He uses Nature, not consciously for dramatic or impressionistic reasons, but as he says, "I've simply tried to present the West as it is, not in accordance with the artificial demands of 'dramatic plot', or 'love interest', or 'artistic balance', or anything that would interfere with a true picture". Yet in picturing truthfully, all these things were added. The spirit of the setting harmonizes with the spirit of the characters, because he is seeing it through their eyes. When the gold-seekers are satisfied, the reader feels too their warm content and enjoys looking with them "for the first time with seeing eyes" that, "the little up-sloping meadow was blue and dull-red with flowers; while below the stream brawled foam-flecked among black rocks", the high hills rose up to meet the sky, and at our backs across the way the pines stood thick and serried". He goes on, always describing through the eyes of his characters; "We entered a cool green place, peopled with shadows and the rare considered notes of soft-voiced birds.----The golden sunlight flooded the mountains opposite, flashed from the stream, lay languorous on the meadow. Long bars of it slanted through ~~the~~<sup>the</sup> ~~unneeded~~ gap in the hills behind us to touch with magic the very tops of the



trees over our heads. The sheen of the precious metal was over the land".

His descriptions are not frequent, but when they do occur, they are like this - condensed, accurate, active and vivid, and permeated with the spirit of the time and place. His titles suggest the importance he attached to the nature background, "The Silent Places", "The Blazed Trail", "Gold". His contribution is the true life of California presented with what someone had called "the divine carelessness of genuine artistry".

One great literary field in the United States is not yet considered - the Middle West. For a long time this section seemed devoid of all poetry or romance. It was thought to lack natural beauty, to attract only the poor and failing, to produce only men of coarse and clod-like instincts. It took a man of that soil itself to look with insight into the elemental heart of the real westerner. It took one who had grown up with the music of the wind in the cornrows, whose spirit had been quickened by the mystery of the rolling, far-reaching, infinite hills - to tell the story of the West. And the one who has made that story is Hamlin Garland - of the Iowa cornfields and the Dakota wheat-fields, of the blood and sinew of the land. The sultry heat, the shimmering, burning sun, the gold and green stretches of wheat and corn, the singing whirl of insects - this is the realism of Garland's West. The moving of the wind through the rustling corn, the laughing of the water over clean little stones, the cloud shadows dappling the smooth surface of the river, the blue



spaces, cool and sweet and restful, - this is the romance. Theirs may be the spirit that is burned dry by the hot and sultry sun, eyes blinded by the dazzling light on the eternal monotony of shining corn leaves, hopes made stagnant and stolid by the dragging burden of endless, aching labor. Theirs may be, on the other hand, the spirit of the open places - free and reaching and far-seeing. This latter is the spirit of Hamlin Garland, but his is also inseeing enough to understand the other. He has been both himself. He has rebelled and lost his soul in the drudgery under the blazing sun. He has also looked into the far distances and has been renewed in heart. Garland is a man inseparable in personal character from the soil that reared him. It is impossible to estimate him without showing his close relation to the Nature about him. To one who is likewise flesh and spirit of the West, Hamlin Garland seems to be the West almost incarnate. He is the inevitable voice of its burden, its injustices, and its great purpose.

His art is unstudied. His descriptions are the finest thing we have so far in the portrayal of nature background. They are accurate; for instance, "A kingfisher crossed and re-crossed the stream with dipping sweep of his wings". They are vivid in details, and also in wholeness of view; "A corn-field in July is a sultry place. The soil is hot and dry; the wind comes across the lazily murmuring leaves laden with a warm sickening smell drawn from the rapidly growing, broad-flung banners of the corn. The sun, nearly vertical, drops a flood of dazzling light upon the field over which the cool shadows run,



only to make the heat seem more intense". They are occasionally long, but they so vibrate with the rythm and motion of Nature, and hold one with the lure of color and smell and sound that the reader does not skip them. They are active, not passive, descriptions, and are intensely impressionistic. He keeps Nature less in the background, and interprets life truly, but, unlike the writers who omit all nature depiction, he makes us see more than we have seen before. He trains our eyes and we see with a new joy the miracle that has escaped us. He shows the close, inseparable connection between men and their soil. He cannot then tell his story without much of the soil in it. For instance, Grant, in "Up the Coolly", is the inevitable result of the grinding toil on the sun-scorched little farm, while his brother Howard is also the other result - the clean magnetic cheer-loving lad with unquenched enthusiasm and zest for living. There are two sides to the intense western life. Some men are made by it, while others are broken. Garland's characters represent both kinds, and he shows that they are the direct outcome of the nature background from which they spring. Garland calls himself a "son of the middle border"; there will be greater sons to come, and these may well spring from the farther border, for "stepping westward seems to be a kind of heavenly destiny". His work is now the greatest achievement in nature interpretation in American literature. Cooper did almost as much, but his descriptions have not the



accuracy or the impressionism given by carefully chosen words or intense feeling. Most of our writers have attained some distinctive worth in interpreting the unique life of America, but none have gone so far on the road toward the ideal of incarnating Nature as the fundamental protagonist in all life stories, as has Hamlin Garland.

So do they all who write for times to come. They make Nature the strong background, if not like Garland, an actual working influence. Because our nature background is different from any other nation's, we have a different literature from any other anywhere. No other literature makes Nature so prominent unless it be Scotland. No other literature has the wholesome, proud, and reverent attitude toward its Nature that America has. What we lack in quantity and in some kinds of quality, we come near to making up in our alliance with Nature.

While we may say that our nature background has contributed an element of distinction to our literature, there is yet another result. It has succeeded in keeping our senses and interests alive to Nature. School children who would grow up never seeing the woods to know their spirit, are brought to a desire for knowing, by "The Waterfowl", "The Luck of Roaring camp", "The Last of the Mohicans", and countless others. The love of Nature is potential in everyone. But it is dormant unless stimulated. One is indifferent until he has something to look for, until the meaning is somewhat interpreted, until he learns the signs and symbols in order to read for himself. Our literature is for most of us the initial stimulus. From knowing "The Waterfowl", we catch a new beauty in the spirit of a



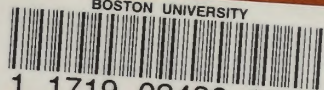
gray autumn night. From an hour with Bret Harte, camping and exploring take on finer possibilities. Thoreau and Burroughs make us long to work out for ourselves a nearer knowing of forest and waste.

Literature has to do with people and what is of universal meaning to them. Human ideas, instincts, and emotions have most of such meaning, and they are the themes of our writing. However, these spiritual abstractions must be bodied forth in concrete life; and life is Nature. People are the result of an age-on-age progress--they are the composite of all that is primitive and divine in Nature.

Nature then is truly our great background. We are infinitely more closely related to her than occasional tramps in the woods, occasional dreams at sunset--we are bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh. All of life is a great unity, and Nature works as a basis before our birth and as the constant shaping influence throughout our lives. She is a stern mother, sacrificing her children for just ends which they themselves fail to see. Literature must then take account of this silent, powerful influence, and interpret, according to the varying philosophies of its writers, the meaning of this Omnipresence and Omnipotence, that Emerson, the seer, calls the "garment of the Invisible Spirit."



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